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## The Poison Gas Tax

BEFORE the war, it was the fashion to satirize a particular class, and that not a very large one, as pre-eminently "the spenders." The picture was far from a lovely one. The spenders were wastrels on a large scale, people who lavished money on stupid luxury and ostentatious display. They were characterized by thoughtlessness, materialism and lack of any larger ideas or ideals than those of selfish indulgence and competition in snobbery. They were the "social climbers," and the moral of their mistake was often pointed by the proverbial and logical devolution of waste into want, or by a progressive hardening of heart in regard to the weal or woe of the producing class upon whom the spenders were parasites.

Since the war, we seem almost to have developed into a nation of spenders. In a very large degree, people in every walk of life are suffering today because they flung to the winds in reckless expenditure the gains harvested in the fat years of brisk business, big profits and high wages, so coming unprovided to the lean years of diminished buying, unemployment and lowered wages. In the matter of governmental expenditures, the degeneration into spending of the vicious sort that involves prodigal and prodigious waste seems to have taken a stranglehold on those in control of the national purse strings. We piously denounce the "militarism" of European countries, and then go ahead and vote for military and naval purposes several times our pre-war scale of expenditure. The people are suffering for lack of housing caused by the shortage following several years' embargo on building during the war; but the money that might be put into the provision of this prime necessity is diverted into the foolish luxuries of big fleets and armies, the multiplication of government departments and government employees, just as on the private side, material and labor are thrown into the building of motion picture theaters, or the production of million dollar "spectacles," on such a scale that neither material nor labor are left for homes or schools or for decent salaries for teachers.

"Uncle Sam is rich!" was a phrase often heard during the war at Washington and elsewhere in justification of what ordinarily would be deemed rank extravagance. And it is possible that Congress but reflects a national sentiment. We are temperamentally a free-handed folk, spurning to be thought over-regardful of the pennies, or even of the dollars. Franklin has in large measure ceased to be our patron saint, or thrift our cardinal virtue. Especially do we disdain to be thought "pikers" when it comes to spending other people's money—the public money. In flinging away money on government expenditures we act as if the United States Treasury was a sort of inexhaustible Fortunatus purse. "This is a billion dollar country!" declared the late Speaker Tom Reed when his party was criticized as that of the first "billion dollar Congress." Today we are spending multiplied billions and when any criticism is heard there seems to be no other thought than that of endlessly piling up the burden of taxes on the people, or of the issuing of loan upon loan which only means deferred taxes with additions for interest. And the taxpayers grin and bear it.

How would we feel if instead of paying this ever-increasing tribute under camouflaged descriptive terms that relate it to its source, we were to confront a tax demand named with reference to its destination? What if we were called upon to go down into our jeans and hand over our hard-earned money as "Poison Gas Tax," for instance; or battleship tax, or submarine

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tax, or congressional junketing tax, or big gun tax, or seed-distributing tax, or farm betterment tax, or good roads tax, or high-prices-for-home-consumers tax? Is it not possible that we would be awakened into a new sense of responsibility? A national budget, of course; but a national budget is not enough. Let every taxpayer have the truth brought home to him as to just what proportion of his good money his stewards propose to spend on wasteful in comparison with useful and profitable objects.

## Olive Schreiner

THE recent passing of that very brave and very able woman, Olive Schreiner, calls attention anew and sharply to the book that a quarter of a century ago established her literary reputation and took its place among the few immortal works that were not born to die. "Dreams" is much more than a literary masterpiece, as its author was much more than a writer. As daringly original in both thought and matter as was Walt Whitman's "Leaves of Grass," its tremendous fascination and profound impressiveness were due not so much to its style as to the fact that the style in this instance was in very truth the woman. Simplicity itself, her phrasing, in all its subtle distillation of the finer possibilities of word-welding, was but the entirely natural clothing of really great thought. "Dreams" is the great message of a great soul. In its lightning-like flashes social shams are rebuked by implications that have all the force of finality; but Olive Schreiner's thought is forever positive and constructive. She deals in affirmations rather than negations and always with a fine candor and persuasiveness that stirs the reader to the depths of his being, impelling him to higher and larger purpose in life with clearer understanding of its deeper meanings.

Warmly and intimately human, the book is almost primitive in its compulsion on the reader to face the realities of life in forcing him to face God and his own soul in the dispersion of clouds of doubt and re-establishment of life on the sound and permanent basis of things as they are in eternal reality.

Quite incidentally to her humanness, Olive Schreiner was a great feminist and in the course of her earlier life she contributed telling service to the cause of woman's industrial and political emancipation. We think of her for the most part as prose poet and romancer, remembering "Dreams" and the remarkable novel in which she so strikingly pictured South Africa and South African life and character, "The Story of an African Farm," but in her London years she was one of the little band of Fabians, that did so much for the triumph of progressive ideas in London's County Council, worked with Sidney and Beatrice Webb in their arduous and invaluable labors of social research and gained an intimate knowledge of actual conditions among the poor and among the workers. Her friends feel that the blow inflicted by the war and the rebellion in South Africa probably hastened her end. There is a legend that Cecil Rhodes once asked her to marry him and that for love of her he went unwedded to his grave. Certain it is that with all her respect for his better qualities, she could have had little sympathy with the great "Empire Builder's" imperialistic notions and years afterward she married a member of the South African parliament. The attitude of women to the war was a great disappointment to her. She once said to R. L. Southwaite: "It is a reversion to savagery. The primitive woman was attracted by the man with the most scalps in his belt—so today."

## The Curious Naval Mind

TO THE average citizen, who foots the bills and who is called on to do the fighting and the dying when his country is threatened, the refusal of the Navy General Board to consider a naval holiday or even to approve of a delay of six months in order to give experts time to determine the lessons of the late war, seems folly indeed.

Great Britain may cease the building of dreadnoughts, it appears, but not the United States. Britain, say the pleaders for a great navy, has ceased building because of economic conditions. This is pure and unadulterated bunk. Anyone who has any acquaintance whatever with naval history knows that if the leaders of Great Britain deemed it essential for the safety of the empire to continue building great and costly warships the money would be forthcoming.

The attitude of the board is the attitude of men who make a business of preparing for war. They want all the armament they can get. If they were about to officiate at a duel they would probably clamor for ten pistols for each principal instead of one.

## The Whisperers

IF THE word of the Department of Labor is taken, 3,500,000 people normally employed in the industries of the United States are out of work, while if the statement of the American Federation of Labor is accepted the number is close to 8,000,000. It is probable that the government's statistics are nearer the mark than those of the federation, for the government has the organization for collecting data of this kind and needs to do less generalizing in achieving its totals.

And while the idleness of 3,500,000 men is no light matter and is not to be passed over as a trivial thing, it does not constitute as serious a situation as the "whisperers" would like to have us believe.

"Whisperers," it may be explained, are a species of the human race which delights in spreading dark and foreboding news. The tools of their profession are a knowing look, an air of possessing a great deal more information than they are privileged to tell and a voice which drops easily to a confidential undertone. They thrive because, as someone has said, "a lie can travel around the earth while truth is putting on its boots," and because of the inclination of the human race to believe bad reports. They "have it on good authority" that conditions are going to be worse before they are better, or they repeat ordinary reports, which have been given full publicity in the press, in a manner which shrouds them with gloomy and dreadful portentousness.

The facts, as one can ascertain by even a casual reading of the daily newspapers and of the business reviews, is that the situation is improving daily. Another truth, and one of which we think too little, is that the nation's business has met one of the greatest trials of its history and has come through in a wonderful fashion. No greater proof of the solidarity of business could be asked, or given, than the fact that we have emerged from such a critical period in our financial history without a panic and without bread-lines or soup-houses being a common sight in the cities. There is want and suffering, of course, but no such misery as the present generation has witnessed on more than one occasion within the relatively recent past.

The next time a "whisperer" begins to breathe heavily into your face try telling him these things out loud and watch him collapse.

## The Matter of Mandates

WE ARE reminded in a recent article by former President Poincaré in the *Revue des Deux Mondes* that all mandates under the League Covenant are not the same. There are three distinct classes of mandates, and they should not be confounded. Of course, the man in the street has not bothered his head to draw fine distinctions in this matter. "Mandate" has come to mean to most people merely a cynical euphemism for annexation.

The learned French statesman seeks to correct this popular way of looking at the matter, in so far as France is concerned. "We are in the Levant," he says, "neither to annex territory nor to install our protectorate. We are there in virtue of a mandate which, in accordance with the Treaty of Versailles, we have received from the League of Nations. This is simply a matter of form, it may be said, and in reality we are there to make ourselves masters of that region of the earth. Not at all. In execution of Article 22 of the pact, the Council of the League has created three types of mandates, which are designated by the first three letters of the alphabet. Category A, under which come our mandates for Syria and for Lebanon and the British mandates in Palestine and in Mesopotamia, includes those states which are to remain independent and to which the mandatory powers are simply to lend their assistance. We have not, then, in Asia Minor even the rights, granted under Category B, of administration, under certain conditions, by the mandatory power, much less those coming under Category C designating the countries to be administered as an integral part of the territory of the mandatory power. We are simply and solely auxiliaries and counselors of civilized peoples called, in large measure, to govern themselves. It is because both Christians and Moslems have so understood the matter that they have welcomed our soldiers as liberators."

As to just how strictly either France or Britain is adhering to this limitation of the authority under which they are with force and arms in Syria, Lebanon, Palestine and Mesopotamia, it is very possible that King Emir Feisal, of Damascus, and the Arabs whom Britain is bombing from the air in Mesopotamia like the Moslems who object to Sir Herbert Samuel's rule in Palestine, may not entirely agree with M. Poincaré. The man in the street has not always M. Poincaré's legalistic mind.